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New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: I have come to New York to convey to the Security Council in person — although I could have done it by video, as we have many times — the Secretary-General's grave concern about the escalation of violence in Syria, and to urge the Council to focus on de-escalating that violence and on finding a political path forward for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

We have seen a string of dangerous and worrying escalations, including both inside and outside the de-escalation zones established by the Astana guarantors. There has been a gradual return to back-and-forth competition over territory in Idlib and Hama. We have seen heavy and sustained air strikes across the North-West and in besieged eastern Ghouta, including today. Civilians have been killed on a horrific scale — reports suggest that more than 1,000 have died in the first week of February alone — and strikes have continued to hit hospitals, schools and markets. There have been several allegations of chlorine attacks, in Ghouta and Idlib and now recently also in Afrin. We cannot independently verify those allegations, but such acts, if confirmed, are outrageous and should not go unpunished.

In just two months, 320,000 people have been displaced due to fighting in Idlib — an area that already hosts more than 1.2 million internally displaced persons. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham — Al-Nusra — is active in Idlib. Meanwhile, there are reports of heavy mortar shelling in residential Damascus, wounding and killing civilians, damaging infrastructure, such as Embassies, and falling close to the hotel in which United Nations personnel reside.

The conflict is also spilling over Syria's borders in more than one direction, and there have been increased military intervention from multiple sources. Over the past several weeks, a new cross-border conflict in Afrin has emerged, with no clear end in sight. There are reports of exchanges of fire between Turkish and Syrian Government forces in Idlib, and between the United States-led coalition and pro-Syrian Government forces in the Euphrates valley, with major loss of life. A Russian aircraft was shot down over northern Syria and its pilot was killed. Last weekend, there were Israeli reports of an Iranian drone entering Israeli airspace, which have been denied by Iran; Israeli jets striking targets inside Syria; an Israeli jet shot down by Syrian Government anti-aircraft fire; and of what Israel calls large-scale strikes against the Syria air defence system and Iranian targets. In short, we see developments that raise questions about the sustainability of the Astana de-escalation arrangements, in which we placed a great deal of hope, and threaten wider regional stability.

I have been Special Envoy for Syria for four years now, and this situation is the most violent, worrying and dangerous I have observed during my tenure. I strongly reiterate the Secretary-General's appeal to all concerned in Syria, the region and beyond to de-escalate immediately and unconditionally, and urge all stakeholders, including the Astana guarantors, to use their influence to help reduce the level of violence. I also urge that continued attention be given to maintaining the Amman de-escalation arrangements in place in the south.

Not only are Syrian civilians being killed and displaced in large numbers — even greater than before. They are also being deprived of the humanitarian assistance they need. There has not been a single United Nations humanitarian convoy to any besieged area since 28 November, two and a half months ago. Last week, together with Senior Adviser Jan Egeland, I warned the Humanitarian Task Force of the International Syria Support Group in Geneva of a collective failure to enable effective humanitarian action. At the time, I urged the co-Chairs — the Russian Federation and the United States — as well as other States to take urgent action to ensure immediate and unfettered humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas in particular.

A series of urgent consultations are under way in Geneva. Thus far, no concrete results have been reached, except the one convoy I mentioned earlier. We urgently need genuine de-escalation in order to protect civilians, evacuate the sick and wounded — in particular sick children — and allow humanitarian aid to reach the 390,000 people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. A few minutes ago, we learned that 7,200 people in besieged Nashabiyeh received a partial delivery today. That is encouraging but let us think about it — they account for a mere 2 per cent of the 390,000 people in besieged areas. We need much more sustained humanitarian assistance.

We must also never forget — as underscored by the people in Syria — the need for concrete steps on the release of detainees and abductees, and for the disclosure of information about those who have been missing since March 2011. The United Nations will leave no stone unturned to press the issue, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We also remind the Astana guarantors of their own commitment agreed last December to establish a working group. We urge them to move ahead on this important issue when they meet next. What we are seeing in Syria today not only imperils de-escalation arrangements and regional stability; it also undermines the efforts for a political solution. Yet we will not be deterred from pursuing the Geneva process, which is the only sustainable path towards the solution mandated by the Council.

Members will recall that in December 2017, when I briefed the Council (see S/PV.8142), I laid out a number of parameters and observations regarding baskets 2 and 3 of the agenda — the constitutional and electoral baskets. Then, on 25 and 26 January, I convened a special round-9 meeting of the intra-Syrian talks in Vienna, focused specifically on the constitutional basket. After intensive consultations with the Syrian parties and key States, I made a final statement regarding the constitutional committee to be formed, and stressed that the final agreement on the composition, mandate and terms of reference of the constitutional committee must be reached in Geneva.

For its part, the Russian Federation, which had invited the Secretary-General, also on behalf of Turkey and Iran, to the National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, affirmed that the outcome in Sochi would be brought to Geneva as a contribution to the United Nations-led intra-Syrian talks, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). There were intensive consultations among the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the Secretary-General and myself regarding such an understanding. In Vienna and beyond, I also maintained close consultations with a number of other States at that time.

Accordingly, the Secretary-General asked me to attend Sochi. The Congress took place over one day on 30 January. I attended the opening address by Foreign Minister Lavrov, and senior representatives of Turkey, Iran and other States were present. Afterwards, all internationals left the gathering to enable the discussion to proceed among Syrians. Only Russia's special presidential envoy for Syria, Mr. Lavrientev, remained in the room as host to facilitate the debate, which he accomplished effectively, alongside senior Syrian figures and a presidium of Syrians. I was later officially informed by the hosts that the final statement had been adopted, and was made aware of its content. It has been published on the website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Arabic, Russian and English, as Foreign Minister Lavrov publicly confirmed yesterday, following his meeting in Moscow with the Belgian Foreign Minister.

As the Secretary-General has noted, the final statement embraced a vision of a future in Syria for all Syrians — as reflected in the 12 living intra-Syrian essential principles that came out of the United Nations-led talks in Geneva in November last year. The final statement agreed in Sochi affirmed that a constitutional committee should be formed and stated that it should, at the very least, comprise the Government; opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks, facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva; Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women. The final statement noted that care should be taken to ensure an adequate representation of Syria's ethnic and religious components. It made clear that the final agreement on the mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure and selection criteria for the composition of the constitutional committee should be reached in Geneva, and appealed for the assistance of the United Nations Office in Geneva in that regard.

Given that important final statement, I joined the closing of the Congress to welcome it and to affirm the United Nations intention to proceed speedily and accordingly so as to assist in finalizing all aspects of a constitutional committee, thereby enabling its establishment in Geneva. Furthermore, I publicly noted to the Congress, as I note to the Security Council today, that the mandate given by the Council to the United

Nations in Geneva is to establish a schedule and process for drafting a new Constitution within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). We have been assured by the Russian Federation that it will endeavour to ensure that the Government of Syria fully supports the official outcome of the Congress in Sochi, at which many Syrian Government officials were present. I also take note that the Syrian negotiations commission — that is the opposition embracing all those components specifically mentioned by name in resolution 2254 (2015) — has issued a public statement that is generally positive with regard to moving forward on a constitutional committee under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva.

Since the Vienna and Sochi meetings, both of which were important, I have consulted intensively on the establishment of a constitutional committee. I have had initial discussions so far in Geneva with representatives of the Government of Syria, the Syrian negotiations commissions and a number of other Governments. My team remains in touch with a wide array of Syrian women and men, and I continue to look carefully at the candidates for the constitutional committee, which was conceived in Sochi, and other relevant input. I also continue to pursue the convening of further formal intra-Syrian talks to make progress with regard to all four baskets of the political process in Geneva pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015). I am particularly aware of the need to focus, now more than ever, on the establishment of a secure, calm and neutral environment if a constitutional process is to happen and if United Nations-supervised presidential and parliamentary elections are to take place under a new constitution, as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015). From here, I will be travelling to Munich, God willing, where I will consult with the Secretary-General and join a number of ministers and other senior officials who will be present at the Munich Security Conference.

Herewith is the bottom line of my statement. I intend to strike while the iron is hot and move forward the Geneva process, in consultation with all concerned. To do that, I will need all members of the Security Council — that is, the Council as a whole — and all those who have influence on the Syrian parties, including the Astana guarantors, among others, to push hard on three main points. First, they must work towards de-escaltion, civilian protection and humanitarian access. Secondly, they must work to support the United Nations in Geneva so that the Sochi final declaration can take effect within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). Thirdly, they must work to support the United Nations in facilitating the political process for the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), in particular with regard to advancing real issues in the basket to promote a safe, calm and neutral environment.

The Syrian people and the United Nations need the Security Council's support now more than ever.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Staffan de Mistura for his briefing and all his efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Syria. The United States fully supports his initiative to bring the parties back to Geneva and begin work on a new constitutional committee in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), but we are not going to bring about peace as the situation on the ground continues to escalate with dire risks for the security of the entire region.

Earlier this week, Iranian-backed militias in southern Syria launched a drone into Israeli territory. It was an egregious and unprompted escalation. Iran was once again doing what it does: risking conflict and testing the will of its neighbours and opponents to resist its aggression. Israel rightly took action to defend itself. The United States will always stand by its ally when confronted by provocations from Iran, Hizbullah or the Al-Assad regime, but that incident shines a spotlight on the reality in Syria today. We are seeing actors engage in a dangerous game of pushing boundaries instead of behaving responsibly and committing to peace.

Last week, pro-regime forces launched an unprovoked attack against the Syrian Democratic Forces and advisors from the coalition to defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. This was a large attack involving numerous tanks, artillery and fighters. The coalition acted in self-defence to repel the attack, and the United States will always reserve the right to act in self-defence. But the attack showed the recklessness of pro-regime fighters. Parties on the ground need to adhere to all established deconfliction mechanisms, and ensure that nothing like that ever happens again.

The Al-Assad regime has become a front for Iran, Hizbullah and their allies to advance their irresponsible and dangerous agenda for the Middle East. On every front of the conflict, we find fighters imported by Iran

from Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan. When we see the Al-Assad regime starving civilians in eastern Ghouta or pummelling schools and hospitals in Idlib, we see advisors from Iran and Hizbullah helping direct those atrocities. That support for the Al-Assad regime, of course, is not new, but the drone flight this week was a wake-up call for all of us. Iran and Hizbullah are making plans to stay in Syria. When we look out across the Middle East, we know one thing for certain: when Iran and Hizbullah move in, instability always follows.

Therefore, when we talk about peace in Syria, we need to face the reality of what is happening on the ground. Peace is urgently needed in Syria. All of us on the Security Council know that, but we cannot offer support for peace, on the one hand, and ignore the fact that the chief sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East and its terrorist militia are digging in, on the other. Even as we talk about peace at the United Nations, the fighting is getting worse. Much of the violence is happening in so called de-escalation zones. Russia was supposed to guarantee adherence to those de-escalation zones in order to help the political process, but, then again, Russia was also supposed to guarantee the removal of all chemical weapons from Syria. Instead, we see the Al-Assad regime continues to bomb, starve and — yes — gas civilians.

All of us on the Council know what it will take to get to peace in Syria. More than two years ago, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015), which includes a framework for ending the war. The United States is committed to seeing the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which President Trump and President Putin also reaffirmed when they met in Viet Nam in November 2017. We also know how peace talks need to happen. There is no doubt that Geneva and the United Nations-led political process are the sole, legitimate venue for coming up with a political solution in Syria. Special Envoy De Mistura has talked about setting up a constitutional committee, and he must be fully empowered to do so. No party should have a veto over the United Nations decisions about the composition of the constitutional committee, but it is hard to see how a peace process will work while the Al-Assad regime continues to launch all-out attacks against the Syrian people and Iran and Hizbullah are entrenching themselves within the country. Ultimately, we must recognize that the Al-Assad regime does not want peace unless it is peace on its terms — a peace in which every person in Syria who opposes the regime is murdered, tortured, starved, imprisoned or forced to flee the country. If the Geneva process is going to work, therefore, we need to see a change. As one of Al-Assad's key backers, Russia can change that behaviour. It can push the regime to commit to seeking a real peace in Syria — a peace that helps the Syrian people, a peace that helps ensure the region's security. Now is the time for Russia to use that leverage.

The road to peace will come when all of the parties stop provoking each other and choose the responsible path. That path is clear: follow resolution 2254 (2015), support Geneva and, most of all, push the Al-Assad regime to do what it plainly does not want to do. If we rally around those goals, we will achieve real peace in Syria.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing. It was very interesting to hear his assessment of the results of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi on 29 and 30 January. His participation on behalf of the United Nations lent the event particular significance. The Congress was a success, and one more important step was taken towards the restoration of peace and stability in Syria. A genuine prospect has emerged for revitalizing a peaceful intra-Syrian dialogue. For the first time, we were able to bring together in one hall more than 1,500 representatives of the majority of domestic forces and from many members of external opposition forces. While we saw no individual leaders from the Riyadh opposition negotiation group in Sochi, a third of its members attended in a personal capacity. This unprecedented representation attests to the understanding established by the Security Council that Syrians themselves must determine their country's future, with no diktats from outside.

The Congress participants affirmed their commitment to a settlement under the auspices of the United Nations on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and took concrete decisions. The final statement includes 12 principles for the future Government structuring of a renewed Syria, formulated under United Nations mediation. The Syrians agreed to establish a constitutional committee and called on the Secretary-General to instruct Mr. De Mistura to assist in organizing the work of preparation for constitutional reform and on a definitive agreement about the committee's composition and powers. We hope that this will be conducted transparently and that the United Nations mediation will make the most effective use

possible of the understanding reached by the Syrian participants in Sochi. However, one thing is clear, and is the premise we proceed from, which is that the decisions on every issue related to the Government's structure, including the constitutional basket, will be made by the Syrians themselves, without any external pressure or any principles or plans drafted on their behalf or in their place. The Congress also adopted a request to the international community from the Syrians for help in ending the crisis and rebuilding Syria's economy.

Russia will continue to support the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva. We regret the position taken by some countries in dissuading some members of the Syrian opposition from going to Sochi. This small group is continuing its less than constructive activities by putting out documents in a narrow platform anticipating the outcomes of the Geneva discussions on Syria's future political arrangements, which does not accord with resolution 2254 (2015). The 12 principles that I referred to represent the sole basis for discussions of constitutional reform issues, as agreed on by the Syrians in Geneva, approved in Sochi and affirmed in the Congress's final statement, which we are circulating today as an official Security Council document. The most fundamental of the principles remain respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, non-interference in its domestic affairs, and the Syrian people's right to independently determine their future.

We are frankly disturbed by the disrespectful attitude of some international and regional stakeholders to the issue of Syrian sovereignty, of which there have recently been some extremely worrying manifestations. It is important to understand that this will not help to normalize the situation in Syria or the region as a whole, and that it exacerbates the conflict and makes the prospects for a political settlement less likely. At the same time, passions have also become inflamed over the humanitarian and chemical aspects of the Syrian issue, as was particularly noticeable against the backdrop of the success of the Sochi Congress. As usual, there are powerful disinformation resources behind this. Just today we heard unfounded new allegations against Syria and Russia from the United States delegation.

There is always some demand being made of Russia. We are not going to demand anything, but we would like to ask our United States partners and the other Coalition partners who can influence opposition members to persuade them to ensure cease hostilities and refrain from provoking further escalation. By the way, we have a different view of the incident that occurred in eastern Syria between Coalition and pro-Government forces. It was an unprovoked attack. We already said during consultations that the humanitarian situation in Syria has different features and causes in different areas. The reasons for each are different and the approach to each of them should be differentiated. I am not even going to bother discussing the unproven allegations accusing Damascus of using chemical weapons.

I would like not to believe that there are still forces that want to torpedo the progress towards a political settlement for the sake of dubious geopolitical advantage. I think that Mr. De Mistura will agree with us that what both the Syrian people and the United Nations mediators need now is concerted support. Any retreat from that would have unpleasant consequences.

Mr. Ndonga Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to commend the efforts of the United Nations, and particularly those of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, who has just provided us with a detailed description of current events in Syria. His briefing was very alarming and worrying — 1,000 civilians killed in the space of a week, 1,200 internally displaced persons and the shelling of residential areas in Damascus are indeed issues of great concern.

The worsening violence is not only disturbing for millions of Syrian citizens, with its numerous casualties and massive displacement, it is also undermining our shared political and humanitarian commitment. The situation in Syria is deteriorating rapidly, with civilians suffering the impact of the political crisis, and in this chaotic scenario we are likely to be facing yet another major humanitarian disaster.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea underscores the need for the parties to the conflict to strictly comply with the obligations incumbent upon them under international law. Actions by parties at the national and international levels should always be carried out within the framework of Security Council resolutions. In that regard, resolution 2254 (2015) urges the belligerents to adopt measures that promote the re-establishment of lasting peace.

The actions of the warring parties that prevent access to humanitarian aid constitute a clear violation of the rules of international law. In the case of a non-international armed conflict, impeding

humanitarian assistance violates human dignity, according to the parameters of Common Article 3 to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and to Protocol Additional II, of 8 June 1977. It should be noted that the attack on humanitarian assistance personnel, facilities, materials, units or vehicles is considered a war crime pursuant to the Rome Statute, both in the context of international and non-international armed conflicts.

Likewise, we join the request made by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities in order to guarantee the provision of humanitarian assistance in Afrin, Raqqa, Idlib, eastern Ghouta, Fo'ah, Kefriya and the Rukban camp — areas besieged by armed groups and where the level of violence is critical.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea always advocates a negotiated solution to problems, however complex the situation. In order to achieve the desired political agreement, direct, frank and inclusive negotiations are an inevitable step, which is what Equatorial Guinea advocates. For that reason, our Government welcomes the holding of peace talks in Vienna on the Syrian issue and is glad that, for the first time since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, 1,500 Syrian representatives from all backgrounds, creeds and almost all political views came together under the framework of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress held in Sochi at the end of last month.

Although criticized by some countries, the Sochi conference was unique in being driven, reshaped and framed by the United Nations. The participation in that intra-Syrian meeting by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in Syria, Mr. De Mistura, gave way to the creation of a constitutional committee. Efforts must now be made to ensure the effective functioning of that committee. Equatorial Guinea congratulates the participants for their efforts to engage in dialogue through direct and inclusive negotiations and hopes that the decisions taken in Sochi will lend new impetus to the United-Nations sponsored negotiations in Genevaon the political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

Despite all of those efforts, it is entirely necessary to drain the country of all terrorist activity. That must be a priority for the international community, given that the presence of terrorists significantly hinders the possibility of reaching a peaceful and definitive solution to the Syrian issue.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this informative meeting ,and we thank Mr. De Mistura for his complete briefing. We acknowledge his intense and always prudent work, and we express our commitment to positively contribute to the success of his efforts.

We would like to begin by expressing our deep concern about the new and recent actions by regional actors and about the escalation of the conflict in Syria. It constitutes an additional threat to peace and security in the Middle East and should lead us to reiterate the need to end the conflict. It is especially necessary to end the suffering experienced by the Syrian people, as well as the grave and ongoing violations of international law and international humanitarian law, including the use of chemical weapons.

First, against that backdrop, it is now more urgent than ever to move the political process forward. The 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015) should continue to guide our efforts; there is no military solution to the conflict. In that regard, we welcome the fact that the parties focused on substantive aspects during their recent conversations, including the holding of United Nations-supervised elections and the constitutional issue.

However, we must express our concern about the lack of tangible results following the eighth and ninth rounds of negotiations held in Geneva and Vienna in December and January, respectively. We believe it is necessary for the parties involved to work constructively in determining the mandate of a constitutional committee, including its terms of reference, selection criteria and other related matters. In that regard, we would like to especially highlight the efforts of Mr. De Mistura to launch, as soon as possible, the constitutional committee agreed to in Sochi. We would also like to underscore the importance that initiatives, such as the one in Sochi, are always complementary to the Geneva talks process, as Mr. De Mistura also indicated today.

Secondly, there is also a need to address the root causes of the conflict. To that end, the solution to the conflict must be comprehensive and allow for the presence of the State in all areas of the country to ensure security, safeguard human rights and promote sustainable development for the entire Syrian population. It is also necessary to promote increased participation by women and young people and to

strengthen civil society organizations, especially in the drafting of a new constitution.

Indubitably, the Syrians themselves bear the primary responsibility for arriving at a solution to the problem. However, the international community and the Security Council have a moral responsibility to end that tragedy, and for that reason we must be united in lending our full support and active engagement to Mr. De Mistura in the successful discharge of his duties.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to begin by thanking Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing. I am very glad to see him in New York. China commends and will continue to support Mr. De Mistura's efforts to promote the political process in Syria.

Recently, positive momentum has emerged in the quest for a political solution to the Syrian issue. Major progress has been made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress meeting held in Sochi. The meeting has played a positive role in advancing the political process in Syria, and provided new impetus for the resumption of the talks in Geneva. China commends the Russian Federation and other countries for their efforts to hold that dialogue. We support the United Nations in its work as the main channel of mediation for a political solution to the question of Syria.

A political settlement remains the only way forward on the Syrian issue. The international community should support the Geneva peace talks in making substantive progress at an early date, as well as the Astana dialogue in steadily consolidating the momentum for a ceasefire in Syria, thereby pushing all parties in Syria back to the negotiating table through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned approach to reach a solution that is acceptable to all parties — one that accommodates all concerns. During that process, the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria should be upheld and respected.

Fighting terrorism is a major aspect in finding a solution to the Syrian issue. The international community should step up counter-terrorism efforts in collaboration, uphold uniform standards and resolutely combat all terrorist organizations designated as such by the Security Council.

China has been striving to play a positive and constructive role in bolstering the quest for a political solution to this issue. China's special envoy for Syria, Mr. Xie Xiaoyan, attended the most recent round of Geneva talks as part of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, holding extensive communication with all parties with a view to promoting reconciliation and facilitating dialogue.

Recently, there have been outbreaks of conflict in many parts of Syria, about which China is gravely concerned. China follows closely the humanitarian situation and the refugee issue in Syria. We are ready to continue providing assistance to the greatest extent possible. We stand ready to work with the international community in pushing for an early, comprehensive, just and appropriate solution to the Syrian issue.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, for the quality of his briefing on developments in the political process in Syria. It must be acknowledged that the situation is becoming increasingly alarming and of concern on the military and humanitarian fronts. My delegation also congratulates him on his tireless efforts for political dialogue among the Syrian parties in order to find a lasting solution to the protracted crisis in the country.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the holding of intra-Syrian peace talks in Vienna on 25 and 26 January as part of the political dialogue of the Geneva process. Likewise, we encourage the various initiatives that have been undertaken, in particular in Sochi, Russian Federation, with a view to calming and definitively resolving the crisis in Syria in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

My delegation regrets the fact that, despite the declared will of the various stakeholders, the most recent initiatives in the context of the political dialogue among the Syrian parties have not led to any significant progress on the ground. On the contrary, we have for some time been witnessing a military escalation and an upsurge in violence, which, if left unchecked, may lead to a spillover of the conflict.

My delegation would therefore like to call for a ceasefire and an immediate de-escalation of the conflict in Syria at the risk of witnessing a greater humanitarian catastrophe. We once again thank the United Nations for its ongoing efforts to protect and to provide humanitarian assistance to the besieged people of Syria.

In particular, my delegation would like to extend its support to the draft resolution initiated by Kuwait and Sweden to put in place a 30-day ceasefire in Syria, which would allow the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid to the populations in distress. In the light of the tragic situation in Syria, we call on the members of the Security Council to show flexibility in order to reach a compromise that will allow the safe delivery of humanitarian aid so as to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

In order to prevent a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation, my country urges the parties to the conflict to work together towards a lasting political solution, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), which is the only way to end the violence and tragedy being experienced by the Syrian people.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his briefing. We acknowledge the complexity of his mandate and we would like to once again assure him of our full support for his work.

Since Bolivia assumed its seat as an elected member of the Security Council, we have of course shown our support for the various meetings held in different contexts and at various levels. Each of those meetings provided an opportunity for the establishment of de-escalation zones, a cessation of hostilities and the provision of humanitarian access. For example, the work done in Astana, the meetings in Moscow, Cairo and Riyadh and the agreements on de-escalation zones between Jordan, the United States and Russia and between Russia, Iran and Turkey are signs of progress.

Clearly, our primary concern remains the urgent need to make progress in a political process that allows for a resolution of the conflict in Syria so that the population can regain peace. We believe that there has been a significant step forward. My delegation wishes to highlight the commitments made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi on 30 January, since those commitments focus on strengthening the political process led by the United Nations in the context of resolution 2254 (2015), particularly through the drafting of a new constitution by a constitutional committee. We commend and acknowledge the efforts of the Russian Federation in that regard.

We also highlight the principles agreed at the Congress to strengthen the political process. Such principles would be directly linked to the commitment of the parties to respect the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria in the context of its right to choose its own political, economic and social system without pressure or external interference, as well as to unify their armed forces in order to defend and ensure the rule of law and respect for the rights of their population and to combat the threat of terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

A clear sign of the readiness to encourage that process is the establishment of the constitutional committee, composed of a delegation of the Syrian Government and a diverse delegation of the opposition, broadly represented by civil society, women and tribal, ethnic and religious leaders. Together, they cover and represent in an inclusive way most sectors of Syrian society in order to debate the drafting of constitutional reform. We emphasize that part of that agreement has provided that the mandate, the terms of reference, powers, the rules of procedure and the selection criteria for the composition of the constitutional committee should be arrived at through talks conducted by the United Nations in Geneva.

We believe that that is a significant step in the political process, and the results of the meetings held in Vienna and Sochi make it possible for us to acknowledge it as such. However, we regret the fact that the critical situation that the Syrian people are still experiencing with the latest escalation of tensions in recent weeks shows us that there is still a long way to go. In that regard, we echo the words of the Secretary-General when he said: "We must never forget that progress towards a political settlement needs to be accompanied by progress on the ground."

The Security Council now has the challenge of urgently calling on the parties involved to unite their efforts and to continue the momentum provided by the political process in order to promote dialogue and consensus that facilitate common ground so as to reduce the violence and allow the humanitarian access that is so greatly needed at this time. For that, the willingness of the parties is essential to finding a way out of the conflict, which, as we know, has continued for more than seven years.

Finally, we reiterate that the only option for resolving the conflict is through an inclusive, negotiated and agreed political process, led by and for the Syrian people, that allows a peaceful solution among all parties.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Article 2, paragraphs 1, 4 and 7, of the Charter of the United Nations provide for respect for the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members and that all Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State. Moreover, no provision of the Charter authorizes the United Nations to intervene in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State. Likewise, all 29 resolutions on Syria adopted in the Security Council stress the strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

It is our right today, as it is the right of all peoples of the world who still believe in the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, to wonder what the Council is doing to ensure respect for those purposes and principles wisely established by the founders, with a view to maintaining peace, security and prosperity following the wars and tragedies that they experienced. We in Syria know that our country is not the first victim of violations of Charter provisions and international law by certain members of the Council. However, what Syria has been enduring is the consequence of silence over the course of decades in the face of such violations. What did the Council do when certain Member States undermined the provisions of the Charter and prevented the Palestinian people from exercising their right to creating an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital? What did the Council do when those Member States themselves violated the provisions of the Charter by invading Iraq? What did the Council do when those same States violated the provisions of the Charter and destroyed Libya? What did the Council do when the same States violated Charter provisions by fuelling terrorism worldwide and called it the jihadi movement? What did the Council do when the same States violated the provisions of the Charter and flagrantly interfered in the internal affairs of Member States and looted their resources, as is the case with several African States?

The animosity of certain countries towards Syria derives from the principle of arrogance of power, rather than the rule of law. It reflects disrespect to the purposes and principles of the Charter and a total lack of serious accountability on the part of those who avail themselves of the law of the jungle.

I would like to explain the unprecedented global terrorist war that my country has been subjected to over seven years, amid the silence of some, the complicity of some, the indifference of some, overlooking of some and conspiring of others. Certain influential countries on the Council — I mean the United States, the United Kingdom and France — have done all they can to destroy Syria, its people and its political standing, in order to settle scores with my country by manipulating the provisions of the Charter and violating its provisions so as to achieve their special agendas related to interference at the expense of the blood and the fate of the Syrian people. They have exploited the media, and unfortunately some United Nations employees distort reality about what is happening in Syria and to lie to international public opinion regarding the human suffering of Syrian civilians.

With regard to the suffering of Syrian civilians, it has been inflicted on them by armed terrorist groups for seven years. Such groups use civilians as human shields, target hospitals and schools and use them as military posts, camps and detention centres for the people they abduct. In the past 20 days, the city of Damascus has been subjected to 1,000 missile and mortar attacks. Some Council members have manipulated the principles of the United Nations Charter and violated its provisions by giving orders to their regional partners to invest all they can in media and materials to support armed terrorist groups, by issuing Wahabi fatwas for the shedding of Syrian blood, by opening their borders to facilitate the entry into Syria of tens of thousands of mercenary terrorists from more than 100 Member States of this Organization, by setting up training camps in neighbouring States and by calling these terrorists moderate Syrian opposition. Today those mercenary terrorists who come from more than 100 states are simply called Syrian opposition. It seems that their DNA has been altered, and now they are just the Syrian moderate opposition.

It is no secret that this support to the terrorists has cost those States $137 billion, as confirmed by the former Prime Minister of Qatar. It is also no secret that the former United States Ambassador to Syria confirmed that his country had spent $12 billion over the four years from 2014 to 2017 in order to change the regime in Syria, as officials in Washington, D.C., want to do in Baghdad, Lybia, Syria, Venezuela and Iran.

WikiLeaks documents have revealed the policies of successive American Administrations and shown that the United States Government has been opposed to my country since the American and British invasion of Iraq. Those countries have manipulated the principles of the Charter and violated its provisions by giving armed terrorist groups toxic chemicals to use against innocent civilians, subsequently manipulating the locales of such incidents and providing the investigation mechanism with concocting false information and fake testimony to accuse the Syrian Government in order to find an excuse to attack it.

There are 136 letters in the dossier I hold here, sent to the Member States by the Syrian Government and containing very important information on the acquisition of chemical substances outside Syria by terrorists for their use in Syria. Those chemicals were indeed used in Syria and, as I just said, 136 letters were written about them. The Council has the letters, but only a few of its members were interested in reading them.

One of the most important political magazines, the American *Newsweek*, published an article on 8 February written by Ian Wilkie entitled "Now Mattis Admits There Was No Evidence Assad Used Poison Gas on His People". The United States Secretary of Defence admits in that article that there is no proof of the use of toxic gas by the Syrian Government against it people, neither in Khan Shaykhun nor in Al-Ghouta in 2013. The French Minister of Defence, Florence Parly, also said yesterday, like her American counterpart, that there is no documented proof of the use of chlorine gas by the Syrian Government. Yet the words of the French Minister did not prevent her President from threatening to stage an aggression against my country, Syria, as the former United States Administration did. These countries have manipulated the principles of the Charter and breached its provisions when they tried to legitimize the recurring attacks perpetrated by the forces of what is called the International Coalition, led by the United States, the most recent of which was this illegitimate coalition's attack on 8 February on north-eastern Deir ez-Zor, against Syrian popular forces fighting terrorist Da'esh. This region, which is 30 kilometres wide and 65 kilometres long, and which was attacked by the Syrian popular forces against Da'esh, is under United States protection. Da'esh, which we defeated in Deir ez-Zor and Albuqmal, left these two cities under American protection and entrenched its presence in the region along the Syrian-Iraqi borders. When the Syrian popular forces attacked Da'esh there, they were shelled by the United States Air Force. This is clearly yet another example of the Coalition's real mission and the role played by Washington, D.C. in supporting the terrorist organization Da'esh, as it has done in the past, when the United States targeted Syrian Arab Army sites in Jabal Al-Thardah, near Deir ez-Zor, on 17 September 2016, enabling Da'esh to advance and occupy areas in Jabal Al-Thardah.

The Coalition has deliberately destroyed 90 per cent of the Syrian city of Raqqa and has failed to uphold its commitment to defusing tens of thousands of mines left behind by Da'esh before abandoning the city and perpetrating terrorist acts under its two umbrellas — the United States, east of the Euphrates, and Turkey, north of Afrin. It is unfortunate that in his statement, to which I listened carefully, the Special Envoy made no mention of the occupation of various areas in my country by the United States and Turkey. He did say that there was a cross-border dispute in Afrin, but did not mention the illegitimate Turkish presence in my country and the attack on the Syrian city of Afrin.

These States have manipulated the principles of the Charter and violated its provisions when they stayed silent, along with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, with regard to the repeated attacks by Israel's occupation forces on areas of the Syrian Arab Republic, the most recent being their act of aggression on 10 February, which my United States colleague has attempted to justify by claiming that it was a response to an Iranian drone's flight over occupied Palestinian territory. That is not true; it is false and misleading. It is not the first time that we have witnessed Israeli acts of aggression against the sovereignty of my country. Every member of the Council is aware that Israel continued to violate my country's sovereignty until one of its military planes was brought down by a Syrian rocket over occupied Palestine. Israel has consistently violated my country's sovereignty — and I would like to remind the Council and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of that.

The Council has been prevented from issuing statements condemning terrorist attacks by military organizations and their launching of more than 1,000 missiles and mortars, most recently targeting residential streets and suburbs, diplomatic missions, infrastructure and churches in Damascus and other cities. Those acts of aggression have resulted in dozens

of civilian deaths and hundreds wounded, most of them women and children.

These States have manipulated the principles of the Charter and violated its provisions when they talk about what they call besieged areas in eastern Ghouta and the Damascus countryside. They have forgotten that the residents of eastern Ghouta have been besieged from within by armed terrorist groups that are operating from there, using civilians as human shields and attempting to divert humanitarian convoys for the benefit of their supporters or to sell their supplies to desperate people at exorbitant prices, as happened in eastern Aleppo.

At the time when the United States first decided unilaterally and illegitimately to intervene militarily in my country, Washington stated that its goal was fighting Da'esh. After that, it changed its mind, saying that it was in Syria to establish permanent military bases for safeguarding the strategic security of the United States and its allies. It later changed its mind once again, saying that the purpose of its presence in Syria was to establish armed militias in opposition to the Syrian Government and to enable them to exploit oil, gas, water and hydrocarbons and other resources in Syria — in other words, they wanted to establish a mini-State. Subsequently, it changed its thinking once more, stating that it would remain in Syria even if Da'esh was defeated. It said the same thing about Iraq, in order to justify the presence of their forces there. It has continued to change its mind, saying that it would leave Syria only if a political settlement was reached and the security of its allies was assured. Most recently, it has stated that it is in Syria to fight Iran, Hizbullah and Russia. It has shifted its nuclear strategy and is considering the possibility of using nuclear weapons. Tomorrow, perhaps, it will tell us that it is in Syria to fight Martians from the Milky Way.

The Syrian Government commends the Russian Federation's efforts, and specifically President Vladimir Putin's initiative in hosting the Syrian National Dialogue Conference in Sochi, which was yet another demonstration of the fact that the only way to achieve the aims of the political process in Syria is with Syrian oversight and with no foreign interference of any kind. The conference participants represented every sector of Syrian society — political, social, cultural, economic, and more. Two documents were adopted by an overwhelming majority, a final statement and a document calling for the establishment of a constitutional committee. I very much hope that the results that Sochi has produced will not be misinterpreted.

The final statement, voted on and amended by the Syrian participants, was adopted unanimously by a broad majority through a democratic vote, based on the procedures established for the conference. It represents the basic pillar of the political process that will produce future dialogue and discussion, rooted in a solution that, assuming no foreign interference, will be entirely Syrian-led. The final statement represents a legitimate foundation for any political process, especially considering that it reflects national principles that have unanimous support in Syria and cannot be questioned — respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the Syrian people's right to choose their own political and economic system and to maintain the Syrian Arab Army and armed forces.

Given the principle that the Syrian people themselves must determine their future and their Constitution, participants in the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi adopted a resolution to establish a constitutional committee. Consequently, the committee should be established according to the resolution voted on by the Syrians. The resolution identified the tasks of the committee, and the participants in the Congress did not grant the Special Envoy to Syria any tutelage, delegation or authority to establish the constitutional committee. We in Syria are committed to the decision taken by the participants of the Congress. We are not concerned with any committee set up by foreign stakeholders, and will not deal with the results of its discussions or with anything related to it. The constitutional issue is a sovereign one.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic remains committed to any political course that would end the bloodshed of the Syrian people, preserve my country's unity and independence, ensure its sovereignty and uphold the principle of the Syrian people to determine their own future through Syrian dialogue. This firm principle has been underscored by all relevant Security Council resolutions on the Syrian crisis.

In conclusion, I would like to respond to my colleague of the United States, who called for peace in Syria and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which was approved by her country. The resolution underscores the need to maintain the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of my country,

Syria. Given that the resolution, which was approved by Washington, D.C., underscores the need to maintain the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of my country, Syria, then why does the United States have forces in parts of my country? Has the United States of America not violated the very resolution that its delegation voted in favour of in the Council, where it was unanimously adopted?

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.